Saunter Paradise Hotel: A Wilderness Tamed

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The two-in-one cottages are the newest addition to the hotel

We all need an escape from the city now and again. But this little slice of the natural world comes with all mod cons. Welcome to Paradise.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardena

Saunter Paradise Hotel in Sigiriya is surrounded by lush gardens with a pace so laid back that even the hummingbirds aren't in a hurry. This collection of 45 luxury cottages is the ideal escape from the hustle and bustle of modern life.

You'll find the Saunter Paradise at the heart of Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle, ideally located for exploring the island's top heritage sites. The forbidding rock fortress of Sigiriya rises over the jungle in the distance, while Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, two of the ancient capitals of Sri Lanka, are just a 90-minute drive away. Closer to home, the trails of the Minneriya and Kaudulla wildlife reserves offer the chance to get close to elephants – one of the most important animals in Sri Lankan culture – and a mind-boggling array of bird species. There's exploring to be done within the

grounds of the hotelitself too, where myriad pathways meander through the beautiful garden setting.

The relaxation begins the moment you arrive at the Saunter Paradise, the wide open reception area offering a stunning view of the gardens and villas beyond. It’s a welcome that epitomises Sri Lankan hospitality, the warm smiles of the staff acting as a soothing balm after a tiring journey. Birdsong fills the airs as you make your way across the gardens to your cottage, a soundtrack to the start of a refreshing stay.

The cottages themselves are simply designed—gabled roofs and verandas outside, with spacious, uncluttered interiors—blending effortlessly into their natural surroundings to give the feel of a village environment. What started as just nine cottages in 2011 underwent a complete makeover to reopen in summer 2015 as a much larger, more luxurious property. The hotel now boasts nine superior cottages, 27 semi deluxe cottages, eight deluxe cottages and one suite. Each one is fully equipped with amenities including air conditioning, hot and cold water, cable television, wifi, IDD telephone, mini-bar, safety deposit box and coffee and tea making facilities.

Meals are served in the restaurant, where guests have the option to sit inside, on the shady veranda area or at a table in the garden. Breakfast is a range of continental and Eastern dishes, including a few local delicacies, while dinner is an international buffet, with regular themed evenings offering a taste of various cuisines and cultural performances. On Mondays, for example, there’s a Sri Lankan dance performance on the pool deck and a buffet underthe stars, while Wednesday is Mongolian Night and Friday is all about the barbecue.

General manager Lakmal Perera is upbeat about the future of the Saunter Paradise. The property has maintained a steady rate of occupancy since its formal opening following refurbishment this year, he says, attributing its success to a policy of always putting the guests first, going above and beyond to accommodate their every need. Many hotels call themselves ‘eco-friendly’, but they mean something a little different by the term at the Saunter Paradise, says Perera – yes, you’re surrounded by glorious nature during a stay at the hotel, but the ‘friendly’ bit is all about the men and women there looking after you. The two complement each other beautifully, says Perera, and that’s the secret of a wonderful stay.

Among the many exciting excursions organised by the hotel is the village safari, an

experience offering insights into Sri Lanka’s traditional culture and way of life that includes a ride in an old-fashioned cart, a trip in a canoe and the opportunity to watch the theatrics of a Sri Lankan kitchen before settling down to sample the results. You might be a culture vulture, wildlife enthusiast or just a seeker of new experiences – whatever you’re hoping to get out of your vacation, the Saunter Paradise Hotel is the place to do it.

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